Halt, Studies Urged On Chemicals Tests

8-5-69

By a Washington Post Staff Writer

BALTIMORE, Aug. 4—Maryland's top health official told Washington area opponents of chemical and biological warfare today that he would support a cessation of testing at Ft. Detrick until an independent group can evaluate the installation's safety methods.

Despite prodding by representatives of 11 church and peace groups, Dr. William J. Peeples, the state health commissioner, refused to criticize the morality of CBW research and emphasized that Detrick's safety precautions and accident record are good.

"We may not have paid enough attention to the fact that this potentially hazardous situation does exist," Peeples said, in reference to biological warfare research and development at Detrick and the open-air testing of nerve gas and other chemical agents at Edgewood Arsenal.

Stricter Surveillance

Peeples pledged that the State Health Department would maintain stricter surveillance over the two installations than it has in the past.

He said a visit to Ft. Detrick by three department officials last week convinced him that "there should be frequent inspections (of Detrick) by outside groups . . . frequent checks of their testing records . . . and establishment of a citizens' committee from around the area" to serve as a watchdog over the installation's operations.

Pressed by members of the peace and religious groups, Peeples said he would go along with their call for an end to all testing at Detrick until an outside, independent team of scientists and laymen can investigate the installation's procedures. The groups previously sought a meeting with Gov. Marvin Mandel but were turned down.

Peeples said Detrick officials had assured his department that no open air testing of biological agents is being carried out at the installation in Frederick County.

CBW Preparations

Dr. Evelyn Howard, a Johns Hopkins physiologist, urged the state health officials to make known their concern over chemical and biological warfare preparations.

"We're spending four times as much for CBW as we are for cancer research," said Dr. Howard. "Certainly, this is public health in reverse. We're trying to exert some sort of public control over what the Army is doing."

Dr. Peeples tried to calm the groups' fears over CBW testing by saying there is "a risk involved in everything one does . . . driving a car, smoking a cigarette . . ."

Nora Boskoff of Chevy Chase, representing Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, said that riding in a car or smoking a cigarette "is a matter of choice. We don't have any choice as to what goes on at Ft. Detrick."